

VZCZCXRO1043
PP RUEHRN
DE RUEHLGB #0120/01 0541551
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 231551Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6667
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP 0180

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIGALI 000120

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2020

TAGS: PREF PREL PHUM EAID CG RW

SUBJECT: RWANDA, DRC SIGN REFUGEE REPATRIATION AGREEMENTS

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Classified By: CDA Anne Casper for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: After much deliberation, the governments of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) signed repatriation agreements at the conclusion of a February 16-17 tripartite meeting with the UNHCR in Kigali to discuss the voluntary repatriation of refugees in the two countries. During a visit to the Gihembe camp the Congolese delegation addressed refugee concerns relating to land, security and ethnicity, informing them that the GDRC will need time to prepare for their return. The delegations set the next tripartite meeting for May 18-20; in the meantime UNHCR is drafting a detailed implementation plan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On February 19 UNHCR contact gave Poloff a read-out of the February 16-17 tripartite meeting between representatives from the GOR, GDRC and UNHCR in Kigali to discuss the repatriation of Rwandan refugees in the DRC and Congolese refugees in Rwanda. On day one, a technical working group drafted repatriation agreements and an implementation plan of activities to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees in the two countries. During a presentation by the Rwandan team, GOR officials noted that UNHCR completed a survey in 2008 that showed 83 percent of Congolese refugees were ready to repatriate if peace was restored in eastern DRC. They also described the various savings and loan programs available to ease the transition for Rwandan returnees. During its own presentation, the DRC delegation claimed that 80 percent of eastern DRC is now safe for returnees. They also mentioned that as part of the GDRC's current military campaign in eastern DRC combatants receive \$50 for every weapon they hand over, which has improved the security situation.

¶3. (SBU) On February 17 the tripartite commission, which included a 24 person Congolese delegation, visited the Gihembe refugee camp. The DRC Minister of Interior addressed the refugees and told them that on behalf of President Kabila, the DRC was ready to welcome them back and assured them that land, ethnicity, and security were no longer problems. During a question and answer session, refugees posed questions on those very issues - land, ethnicity, and security - and said that they hear regular media reports about continuing insecurity in eastern DRC. According to UNHCR, the minister avoided the question and delivered a more realistic message, that the GDRC recognizes that repatriation can be a long process and it will need time to prepare for the return of the refugees.

¶4. (C) Upon return to Kigali, the technical group submitted draft repatriation agreements to the heads of the delegations and the UNHCR regional representative from Kinshasa. The signing ceremony was scheduled to begin at 5:30 pm, but the minister of state in charge of community development and

social affairs in the Rwandan Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) refused to sign the agreement due to the wording of one article. According to UNHCR, the original language said that the GOR would be "responsible for protecting returnees from intimidation and persecution." The minister of state said the proposed language was "too negative," and after several hours of heated discussion, the parties agreed to change the wording to say that the GOR would "protect the fundamental rights of returnees." Journalists were present for a press conference that took place at midnight.

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¶5. (C) UNHCR will continue drafting the implementation plan and intends to present it to the two governments by April 1. The next tripartite meeting is scheduled for May 18-19, and the tripartite commission plans to validate the implementation plan on May 20. One of the proposed activities is a sensitization campaign to explain the voluntary repatriation process to Congolese refugees in Rwanda. (Note: Voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees is ongoing. End Note.) The GDRC and UNHCR plan to profile areas of return in eastern DRC by mid-September, after receiving profiles of all Congolese refugees in Rwanda by the end of July. Additionally, the parties discussed the issue of Rwandan citizens going to UNHCR transit centers in DRC and claiming to be refugees, in order to receive a returnee kit that includes about 50,000 Rwandan francs (approximately \$100). UNHCR has difficulty determining the status of these individuals, as most Rwandan refugees in the DRC are unregistered. UNHCR/Rwanda plans to create a profile of repeat "offenders" and share the results with the technical working group May 18-19. According to UNHCR/Rwanda, the GOR dislikes recognizing that Rwandan citizens are willing to pose as refugees to receive money.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Congolese refugees in Rwanda are eager to

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return to DRC if and when security is restored. According to UNHCR/Rwanda the refugees at Gihembe camp understood that the DRC Minister of Interior's change of message during his visit there signaled that the security situation was not stable enough for them to pack their bags and leave that night. Although the three parties agreed to more information sharing, mistrust between UNHCR/Rwanda and the GOR, specifically MINALOC, and a lack of communication between UNHCR/Rwanda and UNHCR/DRC seems to have often resulted in two different assessments of the refugee situation. It appears that all parties recognize the need to craft and follow a solid implementation plan to avoid further destabilizing eastern DRC. END COMMENT.

CASPER